

Mentorship: Working Through Adversity

Date: August 28, 2025
Time: 5:30 PM – 8:00 PM
Location: Abruzzi - 119 King St,
London, ON N6A 1C3

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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak, and Attawandaron Nations. The Peoples of these respective Nations have longstanding relationships to the lands of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. Today, there are 11 First Nation communities in southwestern Ontario, including Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, Munsee-Delaware First Nation, Delaware Nation at Moravian, Chippewas of Caldwell First Nation, Walpole Island First Nation, Aamjiwnaang First Nation, Kettle Point First Nation, Stony Point First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, and Mississauga of the New Credit First Nation. In addition, there is a growing Indigenous urban population. Further, we convey that we value and have deep appreciation for the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

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Agenda

Mentorship Dinner: Working Through Adversity

530-600	Networking
600-605	Welcome, Land Acknowledgement, and Sponsor Introductions - Tahwila
605-625	Mentor 1 Round Table - Soup and/or Salad Served
625-630	Mentor 2 Round Table - Beef Tenderloin Served
700-725	Keynote: Justice Grace - Introduction by Vanetia
728-755	Mentor Round 3 - Dessert Served
800	Closing Out the Night - Jake

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2025 Planning Committee



Jake Aitcheson

Jake Aitcheson is a Partner at Lerner LLP in London, Ontario, specializing in personal injury law. He is deeply committed to advocating for the rights of injured and disabled individuals across Ontario. His dedication to the legal community is underscored by his long-standing service as a Trustee of the Middlesex Law Association since 2016 and his leadership role as President of the association in 2023.

In addition to his legal practice, Jake plays a significant role in supporting local rehabilitation and patient-centered organizations. He currently serves as a Director with the Brain Injury Association of London and Region & as a member of the Southwestern Professional Executive Committee for Spinal Cord Injury Ontario.

Jake's involvement extends to law-related publications. His contributions to professional development include articles such as the overview of the Health Law and Litigation Conference for The Snail in October 2024.

Jake holds his law degree from Western University.



Vanetia R

Vanetia is a litigation lawyer with experience advocating for clients/insurers in complex matters, including insurance litigation, personal injury, municipal liability, and regulatory prosecution. Her practice also includes extensive work in motor vehicle accident litigation, real estate, and construction litigation.

Having served as a Litigation Solicitor and currently as the Assistant City Solicitor, Vanetia manages cases with significant reputational and financial impact, balancing legal precision with practical risk assessment. She independently carries a caseload, including preparing materials and managing all aspects of litigation, including discoveries, motions, mediations, pre-trial conferences, and settlement negotiations.

Beyond the courtroom, Vanetia actively contributes to the legal profession. She guest lectures at universities, leads legal education initiatives, and collaborates with the Middlesex Law Association to host professional development events. She is also committed to community service through ongoing volunteer work focused on mentorship, and access to justice.



Tahwila Husaini

Tahwila joined Shillington McCall as an articling student in August 2023 and was called to the bar in June 2024. She holds a Bachelor's degree from Western University and a Master's degree from Wilfrid Laurier University, where she completed a ten-month placement with a legal clinic. Tahwila completed her law degree at the University of Victoria. In between terms, Tahwila spent her summers working with the British Columbia government in the Policy, Legislation and Litigation Division, as well as with the Ottawa Community Legal Services. At law school, Tahwila volunteered with the Pro Bono Students Canada, the British Columbia Human Rights Clinic, and the Appeal Law Journal. Further, she competed in moots and was awarded first place in The British Columbia Law Schools Competitive Moot, and a factum award at the Gale Cup Moot.

Tahwila's practice includes a wide variety of tort and accident benefits files. She is a member of the Canadian Bar Association, Canadian Defence Lawyers Association, and Middlesex Law Association.



Jim Zegers

As one of London Ontario's most experienced criminal lawyers, James Zegers has represented thousands of clients charged with criminal offences - from shoplifting to murder - and has successfully defended hundreds of wrongfully accused at trial.

James attended Western University where he earned degrees in both English Literature and Education. A graduate of the Western University Faculty of Law, he possesses an in-depth knowledge of criminal law and procedure, including the Criminal Code, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, and the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

The law is constantly changing and evolving, and James is committed to on-going professional development and education.

Keynote: The Honorable Justice Grace



The Honourable Justice Duncan A. Grace received his L.L.B from the University of Western Ontario in 1980, and his L.L.M. from the University of Melbourne in 1990. He practiced in London Ontario and his practice area was Commercial Insolvency and related litigation. On February 10, 2010 he was appointed to the bench initially serving in the Toronto region until March 31, 2012. On April 1, 2012 Justice Grace was transferred to the Southwest Region where he remained until his retirement on November 17, 2023. Justice Grace served as the Local Administrative Judge from August 2014 until January 1, 2023, and most recently sat as the interim Regional Senior Justice from June 1, 2023 until October 7, 2023.

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2025 Mentors



Jacqueline Fortner

Jacqueline joined Dyer Brown after practicing at a well-respected full-service firm in London where she gained broad litigation experience in the areas of motor vehicle claims, subrogation, health law, and occupiers' liability. Jacqueline was called to the bar in 2016, receiving her J.D. from Western University.

Jacqueline is an active member of the Middlesex Law Association and serves on the Board of Directors. She is involved in the London community, serving on the Board of Investing in Children. She has previously chaired the Ontario Bar Association's Young Lawyers Southwest Division and has chaired continuing legal education programming for the Middlesex Law Association.



Jacob Damstra

Jacob is a litigation Partner at Lerner's LLP. He was called to the Bar in 2016 after completing his articles as a Judicial Law Clerk for Justices R.A. Blair, P.D. Lauwers, and D.M. Brown at the Court of Appeal for Ontario. He maintains a dynamic dispute resolution, litigation, and appellate advocacy practice involving complex commercial and insurance disputes, public and administrative law, health law, and environmental, municipal and regulatory matters. He is a frequent guest lecturer, advocacy judge and coach, and speaker and writer on issues of wellness, professionalism, appellate advocacy, and environmental/municipal legal issues.

Jacob graduated with distinction from Western Law in 2015 and concurrently obtained a Master of Arts in History, with a specialization in Transitional Justice and Post-Conflict Reconstruction, focusing on transnational civil litigation to remedy human and environmental rights violations. Prior to his JD/MA program, Jacob obtained a BA (Hons) in International Relations from Western University from which he graduated as Gold Medalist.



Maura Thompson

Maura is a partner at Shillington McCall LLP. With over 27 years of legal experience, Maura is highly specialized in public entity litigation and catastrophic automobile/personal injury claims. Maura's practice is particularly focused on defending claims involving historical sexual abuse, municipal liability and medical/professional/school board negligence. Her clients include insurance companies, municipalities, and public entities such as CASs, schools, group homes, service clubs, paramedic services, LTC facilities and hospitals.

Maura completed her undergraduate degree at Queen's University followed by her law degree at the University of Windsor and was called to the Bar of Ontario in 1997.



Arifa Serter

Arifa Serter is a Partner in the Insurance Services Group, and Litigation and Dispute Resolution Group at Harrison Pensa. Her practice focuses on subrogated claims and insurance defence litigation. Arifa has an extensive insurance litigation practice, ranging from commercial, construction, marine, fraud, property (both residential and commercial), oil spills, floods, fires, professional negligence, personal injury, tort, motor vehicle collisions, to product liability cases. In addition, Arifa prides herself in assisting insurers to negotiate the best possible settlement in order to avoid lengthy litigation.

Arifa has experience arguing cases at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, the Ontario Court of Justice, and the Small Claims Court.

Arifa's strong work ethic and perseverance make her a relentless advocate for her insurer clients. She is known to get her clients very favourable results in an expeditious manner.

At the office, Arifa is a mentor to the firm's articling students and sits on the Student Committee. She is also fluent in Turkish and Bosnian.

2025 Mentors



Rasha El-Tawil

Rasha El-Tawil has been selected by her peers for inclusion in The Best Lawyers™ in Canada in 2022 to 2025, and was recognized as a recipient of the London Inc. “Top 20 Under 40 Award” in 2020.

She has experience in all areas of personal injury litigation including motor vehicle claims, municipal and road authority claims, and historic and institutional sexual abuse claims. Rasha has appeared before the Superior Court of Justice, the Ontario Divisional Court, and the Court of Appeal for Ontario. She regularly appears before the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

Education
Western University, B.A.
Hons Political Science &
Philosophy (Gold Medalist)
2004

Western University, LL.B.
2007

Called to the Bar in Ontario,
2008



BT Granger

The Honourable B. T. Granger graduated from the Ivey School of Business Administration at the University of Western Ontario in 1960. In 1963, he graduated from Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto and was called to the Bar in 1965. He practiced civil litigation with Lerner & Associates in London, Ontario between 1965 and 1988. In 1978, Justice Granger was appointed a Queen's Counsel. While in private practice Justice Granger taught Trial Advocacy at the University of Western Ontario Law School and was a senior instructor at the Law Society of Upper Canada Bar Admission course. He has authored numerous papers, which he delivered at legal and judicial seminars.



Carolynn Conron

Named as one of London Inc.'s Top 20 Under 40, Carolynn Conron is an intelligent and effective advocate who takes the time to really listen and understand her clients' issues. Commander and leader of Conron Law Professional Corporation since 2013, she sees the big picture and is passionate about ensuring no-one is unfairly stigmatized by a criminal conviction.

Carolynn obtained her Honours Bachelor of Arts at McMaster University, graduating Summa Cum Laude in 2006, with a double major in philosophy and communication studies and a minor in psychology. After moving to Canada's West Coast and earning her Juris Doctor (J.D.) from the University of British Columbia Law School in 2009, she was called as a member of the Law Society of British Columbia in 2010 and a member of the Law Society of Upper Canada in 2011.

Discussion Guidance

We encourage conversations to be open, reflective, and informal. You do not need to follow a script, but below are sample questions to guide the dialogue. Choose those that resonate with you.

Understanding Their Journey Through Adversity

1. Can you share a time when you felt completely overwhelmed in your career? How did you get through it?
2. What was the most difficult period in your legal practice, and what helped you survive it?
3. Did you ever consider leaving the profession? What made you stay?
4. How did you know when it was time to make a change—whether in role, firm, or mindset?

Coping Strategies and Tools

1. What strategies helped you manage stress and avoid burnout?
2. How do you decompress after a particularly hard day or case?
3. Are there any habits or routines that helped you stay grounded?
4. What role did therapy, coaching, or peer support play in your resilience?

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Discussion Guidance

We encourage conversations to be open, reflective, and informal. You do not need to follow a script, but below are sample questions to guide the dialogue. Choose those that resonate with you.

Career Direction and Purpose

1. How did you reconnect with your purpose when the work started to feel meaningless?
2. What helped you rediscover joy or meaning in the law?
3. How do you balance ambition with sustainability?
4. What's your advice for someone who feels like they're just "surviving" in their career?

Boundaries

1. How did you learn to set boundaries with clients, colleagues, or even yourself?
2. What's one boundary you wish you had set earlier in your career?
3. How do you protect your personal time without feeling guilty?
4. How do you manage expectations from partners or clients when you're at capacity?

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Navigating the Culture of Law

1. How did you deal with the pressure to always appear strong or “on top of things”?
2. What’s your advice for handling toxic work environments or difficult personalities?
3. How do you advocate for yourself in a culture that often rewards over-work?
4. How do you ask for help without feeling like you’re failing?

Growth & Long-Term Perspective

1. What would you do differently if you could go back to your early years?
2. What would you tell your younger self when you were in your first five years into practice?
3. What habits have helped you manage competing demands and avoid burnout?
4. What skills do you think are most valuable for lawyers early in their careers?

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We encourage conversations to be open, reflective, and informal. You do not need to follow a script, but below are sample questions to guide the dialogue. Choose those that resonate with you.

Mentorship and Support

1. Who supported you during your hardest times, and how did they help?
2. What signs do you look for in yourself or others that burnout is approaching?
3. How did you find your mentor(s), and how did those relationships evolve over time?
4. Do you have more than one mentor? If so, how do their roles differ?
5. What do you think makes a good mentor-mentee relationship?
6. Were there any moments in your career where mentorship made a significant difference?

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